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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000402

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: ELECTION OF A NEW COR SPEAKER STILL ON HOLD
REF: BAGHDAD 206

Classified By: Acting PolCouns John Fox for reasons 1.4(b) & (d)

11. (C) Summary: The CoR has adjourned until February 18, at which time the major political blocs hope to have agreed on a candidate for the vacant CoR speakership an agreement that will allow the CoR to pass the 2009 Federal Budget bill and end the 2008 Fall legislative term. In addition to who wins the post, at stake is -- given Iraq's shifting political landscape -- which coalition or party is able to impose its will in the CoR. The major tussle is whether Sunni Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) CoR leader Ayad al-Samarraie will gain the post. All parties have an interest in this contest: the IIP wants to consolidate its hold (among Sunni Arabs) on government positions while it still has some leverage; other Sunnis assert that an IIP monopoly on all three major Sunni governmental leadership positions is unacceptable. The Kurdish bloc and the Shi'a Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) support al-Samarraie, would accept an alternative consensus candidate but, above all, do not want to jeopardize the Five-Committee process in which the IIP is a key player. Prime Minister Maliki's Da'wa Party is adamantly opposed to al-Samarraie, and seems to be scheming to ensure the appointment of any Sunni who will not threaten Maliki's plan to strengthen the power of the Prime Minister. End Summary.

CoR Speakership: Sunnis Are Divided

12. (C) Council of Representatives (CoR) Speaker Mahmoud al-Mashadani resigned the CoR speakership on December 23, 2008, having been effectively forced to do so following his sustained erratic behavior. By the terms of the sectarian/ethnic power-sharing agreement that led to the formation of the present government, the CoR speakership belongs to the Sunnis. (Note: In the agreed arrangement, the Office of the Presidency must include a Kurdish President, and Sunni and Shi'a Vice Presidents; the Prime Minister must be with Kurdish and Sunni Deputy Prime Ministers; and the CoR Presidency Council must include a Sunni Speaker and Shi'a and Kurdish Deputy Speakers. End Note).

13. (C) The succession crisis began as an intra-Sunni dispute. The Tawafuq bloc, a coalition now composed only of the IIP and the small Iraqi Peoples Convention (IPC), agreed to force the resignation of fellow Sunni Mahmoud Mashadani on the understanding that the Kurdish parties (KDP and PUK) and ISCI would support whichever replacement candidate Tawafuq nominated. From IIP's point of view, Tawafuq gained the privilege of naming the national leaders to represent Iraq's Sunnis as it was the only Sunni group willing to participate in the 2005 elections and in the formation of the government. However, prior to the January 31, 2009 Provincial Council elections, it was unclear that IIP could garner the votes to continue to justify its assertion that it spoke for all Sunnis. Moreover, the CoR speakership had been held by Khalaf al-Ulayyan's Iraqi National Dialogue Council (INDC) in the person of Mashadani. Then, in early December 2008, the INDC announced its break from Tawafuq, leaving it a shell for the IIP and the very small IPC. Thus, in Mashadani's

departure, the IIP saw the opportunity to lock in a third IIP leadership position before the January elections.

14. (C) Unsurprisingly, Khalaf al-Ulayyan's INDC and other Sunni groups have objected to the IIP's attempt to monopolize all three key government positions held by Sunni Arabs. Al-Ulayyan argued that the speakership belonged to the INDC, as his party held that position when it was a part of Qas his party held that position when it was a part of Tawafuq.

Divided Shi'a, Kurdish Interests

15. (C) CoR members have told us that, after Tawafuq unveiled IIP CoR leader and de facto Tawafuq bloc leader al-Samarraie as its candidate, Prime Minister Maliki let it be known that al-Samarraie was unacceptable, presumably because he is a strong personality who would be an advocate of CoR activism as a balance to Maliki's preference for a strong executive. Some argue that Acting Speaker Khalid Al-Attiya, a pro-Maliki Shi'a independent, has intentionally created procedural mechanisms and adopted Bylaw interpretations to delay or postpone the election of any speaker, possibly until provincial election results have taken the wind out of the IIP's insistence on its right to name the speaker.

16. (C) IIP CoR member Salim Jiburi has threatened that, if al-Samarraie political understandings are not honored and al-Samarraie is not chosen, IIP could refuse to participate further with the PUK, KDP, ISCI and Da'wa in the Five-Committee process designed to solve Iraq's most contentious disputes. Following Jiburi's threat, ISCI has

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split from Da'wa by signaling its willingness to support any candidate put up by Tawafuq. Kurdish bloc leader Fu'ad Ma'asum told us that the election of the Speaker must come before the passage of the budget, although other Shi'a and Sunni CoR members have told poloffs that the Kurds are softening their support for the IIP position, and that ISCI and the Sadrists could move to Maliki's camp.

Threats, Scare Tactics Work

17. (C) As CoR members appeared to weary of the IIP's unwillingness to concede the seat to another Sunni entity and began to explore the possibility of postponing the election into the Spring 2009 term, the IIP dug in. First, Samarraie declared he would hold the budget bill hostage to the selection of the speaker, then the (IIP) Chief of Staff of the Iraqi Presidency Office hinted that the Presidency Council (presumably IIP Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi) would veto any budget passed prior to the selection of a Speaker. Furthermore, President Jalal Talabani subsequently went on record to say that the election of a speaker should come before any other CoR business.

18. (C) The IIP has employed other scare tactics, too. They threatened that, if the CoR fails to live up to the political agreement allowing the Tawafuq to name the Speaker and insists that the CoR vote on any Sunni candidates who might nominate themselves for the position (a mechanism toward which the CoR has been moving, and which has resulted in a slate of some eight candidates at this point), Tawafuq would insist that the other two Deputy Speakerships (whose incumbents were named by the Shi'a and Kurdish parties respectively), also be put up for re-election. In other words, they would demand the dissolution of the CoR leadership.

19. (C) At an impasse after days of negotiations and delayed CoR sessions, acting Speaker Attiya effectively threw up his hands on February 9 and declared a break until February 18, at which time CoR members hoped the Sunni parties and the

major blocs would have reached a compromise. The latest rumor is that Maliki is willing to accept the candidacy of former IIP member, now independent Sunni, Hachim al-Hassani. A former National Assembly Speaker and Minister of Industry and Minerals with a PhD in International Organizations, al-Hassani has impressive credentials, but carries some baggage (some consider him a Turcoman, a point that is problematic for some Sunni Arab nationalists). On February 11, al-Hassani told poloff that he is available and willing to take up the speakership but that this would depend on Tawafuq's failing to provide the CoR with a single candidate, and the CoR's decision to vote on a list of candidates.

¶10. (C) Comment: The election of a CoR Speaker has become yet another example of the state of inter- and intra-sectarian and ethnic politics in Iraq. Like the drawn-out debate over the passage of the Provincial Elections law and the ratification of the SoFA agreement, political blocs often see CoR debates as zero-sum games. Moreover, the provincial elections will likely have an effect on bloc alliances at the national level. There are indications are that these effects are already in play. It is possible, but still unlikely, that the game will get out of hand, resulting in prolonged gridlock and delaying the CoR's institutional development.
End Comment.
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